

America and Europe: Transatlantic Ties or Global Responsibility?

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Kurzanalyse

April 2010

Amerika und Europa: transatlantische Beziehungen oder globale Verantwortung?

Heinz Gärtner

Die USA unter Präsident Obama stehen vor globalen Herausforderungen, wie Klimawandel, nukleare Proliferation, Terrorismus, Wirtschafts- und Finanzkrise, Energieversorgung, regionale Konflikte mit globalen Auswirkungen u.a. Die traditionellen transatlantischen Beziehungen, die auf gemeinsamen Werten und wirtschaftlicher Interdependenz beruhen, sind wichtig, reichen aber zur Lösung dieser Probleme nicht mehr aus. Genauso wie die USA muss Europa seine Rolle neu definieren. Es muss sich fragen, welchen Beitrag es in einer globalisierten Welt leisten will und kann. Amerika und Europa sind wichtige Akteure, die Einbeziehung anderer ist notwendig. Auf institutioneller Ebene werden beispielsweise die G-20 immer bedeutender und lösen selbst zunehmend die G-7/8 ab.

Im beigefügten, in Englisch abgefassten Papier wird die aktuelle Diskussion zu diesen Fragen kurz beleuchtet.

America and Europe: Transatlantic Ties or Global Responsibility?

The world requires global solutions. What is the right approach? Are traditional “transatlantic relations” that are based on a common threat, economic interdependence and common values better suited to address global questions, or is Europe’s role in the world, and specifically in relation to the U.S., contingent regarding its contribution to world affairs? Is Obama’s approach of “engaging” partners, competitors, and potential rivals the right approach?

Since the end of the Bush administration there has been an international debate on what kind of world will emerge. The “bipolarity” of the Cold War era is gone. George W. Bush’s “unipolarity” or Charles Krauthammer’s “unipolar moment” is over – if it ever existed.

Multipolarity?

With the absence of a more suitable expression most observers uninventively speak of a “multipolar world” with a few world actors or players, among them the U.S., Europe, China and Russia (as is mentioned in the report of the National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025*). The term “multipolarity” originates from the realist school and implies polarization, balance of power, zero-sum, win and lose. All actors are potential enemies. Richard Haass rejects the polarization reference. Rather, he sees a “non-polar world” emerging. This highlights the necessity of common, rather than opposing, strategies, in solving global problems. One of the emerging measures to address global issues is the G-20. It began by dealing with economic, financial and climate-related questions but sooner or later it will also include other security topics, as was the case with the G-7/8.

A similar observation of emerging powers has been made by Fareed Zakaria and Parag Khanna. Zakaria sees the “rise of the rest” in a “post-American world.” Khanna observes the “rise of the second world,” i.e. almost all others except the U.S. and Europe. Their analyses are not necessarily as declinist as Paul Kennedy’s “Rise and Fall of Great Powers” of 1987. For both of them the U.S. will remain the dominant power (especially in military terms) but their argument is that the U.S. will not be able to act alone.

The “European Union Institute for Security Studies” is not sure whether it prefers more “multipolarity” with the EU as a confident global actor, or more “interdependence.” Therefore, one author (Grevi, 2009) comes up with a mixture, the “inter-polar world.”

Global Challenges – Global Solutions

The “European Council on Foreign Relations” (2009) argues that Europe’s role in the world, and specifically in relation to the U.S., is contingent regarding its contribution to world affairs. This is

because the world requires global solutions. These global challenges include: the economic and financial crisis, climate change, nuclear proliferation and disarmament, terrorism, organized crime, pandemics. Additionally, regional conflicts like in Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programs require common global involvement.

The analyses of most of these and other authors are not based on a realist scenario of decline, zero-sum, up and down of powers. A "balance of power system" or a "global network of political and military alliances" (Kagan, 2009) aren't effective means to solve global problems. Global solutions are not based solely on military contributions.

After all, more than 60,000 European troops are deployed in various missions abroad. Europeans spend about half of what the U.S. spends on defense. But why should Europe compete with the U.S. regarding defense expenditures? They are not enemies or rivals. The EU military expenditures account for one fifth of total military spending worldwide (20.9 percent compared to 42.6 for the U.S. and 2.6 for Russia in 2006). The EU looks like a real "military heavyweight." (Hellmann, 2010) It spends twice as much on defense as Russia, China, India and Brazil together. But the real question is what the focus of security is: "national security" to protect your territory; "human security" to protect individuals all over the world under conditions of regional destabilization, dysfunctional states, poverty, demographic changes and refugee flows, pandemics; or "global security" to meet challenges like global warming, nuclear proliferation, international terrorism? It seems that the U.S. still concentrates more on "national security" and the EU more on "human and global security." The latter, of course, can only be addressed cooperatively and multilaterally.

Economic interdependence

It goes without saying, economic ties can stabilize relations between the U.S. and the EU. Mutual investments of European and American companies in the U.S. and in Europe generate approximately ten million jobs. Both the U.S. and Europe account for 60 percent of the global production and 30 percent of the global trade. (Neuss, 2009) However, both are also extremely vulnerable to the economic and financial crisis, to climate change, proliferation, and terrorism. Economic interdependence is no guarantee for solving political problems. Mutual direct investment (almost 60 percent of the overall investment) did not suffer during Bush's unilateral foreign policy.

Economic interdependence neither necessarily hinders nor helps improve political relations. It is by no means sufficient for achieving political rapprochement to solve common problems. Realists even argue that interdependence is a cause of conflict because it increases vulnerability. Before World War I mutual trade relations among the later war fighting parties were stronger than trade relations between the U.S. and Europe today. On the other hand, the Anglo-American economic relations declined before the war, while critical rapprochement occurred. (Kupchan, 2010a, b)

Democracy

Furthermore, while democracy may help political cooperation, it is not sufficient. The commitment to democracy is good for the citizens but no guarantee for improved international problem-solving. (Kupchan, 2010 a, b) When it comes to nuclear weapons, terrorism, war and peace, crisis management, the economic crisis, carbon dioxide emissions, pragmatic cooperation is required, rather than ideological finger-pointing and intransigencies.

“Engagement”

Traditional “transatlantic relations” that were based on a common threat are not sufficient to address global questions. President Barack Obama’s approach of “engaging” partners, competitors, and potential rivals goes beyond them. It is a strength rather than a weakness and it is a strategy for problem-solving rather than a goal in itself. In the long run, “engagement” can also contribute to democratization and regime change. Examples are: the improving relations of U.S. – Chili, U.S. – Brazil, U.S. – Argentina, and Brazil – Argentina in the eighties; and also U.S. – Philippine relations under Ferdinand Marcos.

NATO

NATO is being transformed. It no longer faces a wholesome territorial assault by Soviet and Warsaw Pact forces. Today it deploys its forces in support of peace and stabilization operations out-of-area and continent desirably mandated by the UN. NATO’s new strategic concept will recognize that the most direct threats to the security of their member states are neither military nor territorial in character, like climate change, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, demographic transformation. At the same time NATO has the huge legacy armed forces left over from the Cold War. It still has to figure out what to do with territorial defense, as defined in Article 5 of its treaty, because it does not expect a major onslaught on Alliance territory. Its forces rather have to operate hundreds or even thousands of kilometers distant. NATO and the EU will have to find some division of labour regarding capacities and geographical fields of operation.

“Multi-partner World”

The best concept for global problem-solving could be Hillary Clinton’s “multi-partner world”, in place of the “multipolar world” concept. This does not mean that competition, polarity, and ideological differences would disappear. But it creates a level of global cooperation. Such attempts emerged after every major crisis: after 1815 with the “Concert of Vienna,” after 1918 with the “League of Nations,” after 1945 with the “United Nations,” after the 1989/90 globalization took place (disrupted by Bush’s unilateralism).

We are moving towards a new world but we do not yet know what it will look like. Of course the U.S. and Europe will be important actors of it but it is equally clear that traditional concepts will not be desirable. The new focus now is on what the U.S. and Europe can achieve in the world rather than the focus on the relationship as an end in itself.

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